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## **Ann Cleeves loves watching ‘Shetland’ TV series to find out what happens next**

Ann Cleeves loves watching the BBC-broadcast spin-off from her *Shetland* novels, to find out what happens next. The author of the acclaimed books was speaking today at a sold-out event at the Edinburgh International Book Festival in the company of Glasgow-born actor Douglas Henshall, who has portrayed central character DI Jimmy Perez since 2013.

“I watch the TV series like you all do,” she told the audience. “I just love watching it. It’s not my work; it’s the script writers’ work and the directors’ work, and I just want to see what happens.”

Cleeves is quite happy with the many differences between her novels and the TV version. “When *Shetland* was first optioned, I made up my mind that I wasn’t going to meddle, partly because you give the project to someone you trust and you just have to let them get on with it,” she explained. “I don’t know how to make good television; my interference would get in the way of the clarity of vision. Even if they listened to me, which they probably wouldn’t, you’d end up with a sort of muddled vision instead of one creative strong image.”

Indeed, the only line in the sand she had was that the location work had to be filmed in Shetland. “I didn’t really care about seeing the scripts. I didn’t know who was going to play Jimmy Perez, but I was very firm that they should film in Shetland, because it is the only place where the stories could be really filmed.”

Arguably one of the biggest changes from book to television is Perez himself, at least in terms of appearance. “In the novels he is the descendent of a shipwrecked sailor from the Armada, so he has Spanish-Mediterranean looks. Olive skinned, dark-haired, dark-eyed,” Cleeves said. That’s not an obvious description of Henshall, unless ginger-heads were also found in the Mediterranean.

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“But what does it matter what he looks like?” Cleeves asked, putting an emphasis on the man’s character. “When I finish the books and they go out to readers; the pictures that you see in your head are not the pictures I see in my head.”

Nevertheless, it does lead to the unusual situation of Henshall having two ideas of Perez. “I’m not *my* Jimmy Perez,” he said. “There’s the Perez I have in my head, who is from the books. The one that I play, is mine.”

Many of the readers and viewers in the audience were clearly interested in the character’s troubled relationships through both the books and television series. “Someone wrote to me saying: ‘I hope he doesn’t meet anybody because we like him lonely and miserable!’” Henshall said. “To be fair, I think that if he met someone who was very happy, I’m not entirely sure if there’d be many other places for the character to go. I think it would be nice, if we were going to run down the show, either that he met somebody or that he died. One or the other; there’s no kind of middle ground really for him; it’s either happiness or death. I don’t think he’d have it any other way.”

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